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Sick of meetings? Here's how to make them matter

By **Tim Hume**, CNN

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A man sleeps at a European Council meeting in Brussels, Belgium.

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

Many view meetings as wastes of time -- but they can be a vital "shop window"

Perform at your best by picturing your boss is in the room with you

Brush up on presentation skills and take the time to prepare thoroughly

Ensure everyone leaves the meeting knowing what needs to be done next

(CNN) -- According to American writer Dave Barry, "if you had to identify, in one word, the reason why the human race has not achieved, and never will achieve, its full potential, that word would be 'meetings.'"

Poorly run, unnecessary meetings can be the bane of a working week. [One British survey in 2008](#) estimated the average person spends eight working weeks a year in meetings, a third of which they considered a complete waste of time.

When such cynicism abounds towards each potential meeting request, it can be easy to forget they can also be engine rooms for ideas and action -- and a chance to shine in the workplace.

Jane Hammersley, co-author of the book [Brilliant Meetings](#) and a consultant to organizations on how they can optimize their meeting practices, says that many people fail to recognize that meetings can help your career. The key, she says, is to treat each one as "a shop window, that can either enhance your reputation or damage it."

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Below are some tips for getting the most out of meetings, whether

you're the chair or simply a participant.

Imagine your CEO is in the room. Says Hammersley: "Irrespective of your responsibility within the meeting, you still have the opportunity to portray yourself as a positive participant -- engaging, voicing opinions, adding value. Pick your attitude. Chances are it will be noticed."

Avoid "death by PowerPoint." The PowerPoint presentation is a humble art, yet one many speakers are yet to master.

Hammersley says it is important not to fall into the trap of simply reading bullet points from slides -- your audience will be reading what you are in their heads, and will simply tune out what you are saying. Instead, take the time to prepare information on the slides that complements your message. "Get rid of the bullet points completely," says Hammersley. "Ensure that you are the presentation, and the PowerPoint is just a crutch. And don't forget to engage the audience with questions.

Preparation is key. Dr Jill Miller, research adviser at the [Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development](#), says many meetings are destined to fail before they even begin, due to poor planning. It's crucial to have a clear purpose and itemized agenda for the meeting. Make sure the people that need to be there, and only the people that need to be there, are present. "Think ahead about what you want to achieve -- and make sure everyone is on the same page," said Miller.

Read more: To reach your potential, 'dare to be different'

Make it snappy. Schedule the meeting for no longer than you think it needs to be -- and don't feel compelled to take up all the time scheduled if it could be wrapped up earlier. Try scheduling it in the morning while people are fresher.

Location, location, location. You don't need to be in the same room to speak face to face these days, and many organizations choose to hold their meetings virtually, eliminating the time spent traveling to meetings.

If your office has a cafeteria space equipped with tall benches, Hammersley suggests holding them there, standing over a cup of coffee. "People tend to have shorter meetings and waste less time when they can't sit down."

Take control. If you're running the meeting, be disciplined about keeping focused on the task at hand. Take it on yourself to cut off participants who stray off topic or whose contributions are not constructive, and draw engagement out of those who are less forthcoming.

If there are details that only concern a subset of the group, leave those discussions for another time. And make sure everyone leaves the meeting with a clear idea of what needs to be followed up, by whom, with an explicit timeline. When talk leads directly to action, then staff are much more likely to respond positively and constructively to future meetings.

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